United Nations A/61/PV.60

General Assembly
Sixty-first session

Official Records

60th plenary meeting
Wednesday, 29 November 2006, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Ms. Al-Khalifa ..... (Bahrain)

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 14

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/61/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/61/355)

Draft resolutions (A/61/L.31, A/61/L.32, A/61/L.33 and A/61/L.34)

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): The situation in the Middle East region still represents a serious conflict that requires action to confront the present dangers and their grave regional and international repercussions. This calls for maximum efforts to reach an internationally agreed comprehensive and lasting settlement to put an end to all conflicts in the region, including the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

We should not ignore the gravity of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, since the elevation of poverty levels and unemployment, already high, and the deterioration of vital civil infrastructure, in addition to shortages of food, water, electricity and other basic necessities, as is the case in the Gaza Strip, aggravate the humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people and can exacerbate tendencies towards violence and hatred and encourage extremism. The continuing deterioration of the situation is reason enough for the international community, including civil society, to make every possible effort to put an end to the killing machines on both sides. The lives of civilians should be preserved and protected at any price possible.

This situation also calls for a resumption and activation of dialogue and the political process. We are all aware that the solution to this conflict can only be achieved politically. Therefore, all resolutions adopted by the international community should be implemented forthwith, and the cycle of violence and counter-violence should come to an end, since it can only produce further losses in life and property for both sides. Positive steps as well must be taken immediately to reach a peaceful, comprehensive, lasting and just solution based on two States living side by side within secure and internationally recognized borders.

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which has lasted for more than half a century, represents one of the main areas of grave concern for the international community. A solution to that conflict would open the door for a comprehensive political settlement that can encourage political and economic stability in the Middle East region.

I would now like to give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Paul Badji of Senegal, in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, who will introduce draft resolutions A/61/L.31 to A/61/L.34, in the course of his statement.

Mr. Badji (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): In an unequivocal show of support for the Palestinian people

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

06-63280 (E)

in its quest for a comprehensive, just and lasting solution of the question of Palestine, Member States, observers, representatives of intergovernmental organizations and civil society addressed the special meeting of our Committee this morning to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. In my capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I would like to thank them for that support and for their active interest and involvement in the search for a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Before I introduce for the Assembly's consideration the four resolutions prepared by our Committee under agenda item 14 of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session, allow me to make some brief remarks as regards the current situation in the occupied Palestinian territory and developments in the political process.

The Committee is very concerned about the rapidly deteriorating situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. Again, it is the Palestinian population in Gaza that bears the brunt of this situation, but the Palestinian people as a whole endure daily hardship and humiliation as a direct consequence of the policies and practices of Israel, the occupying Power.

The withdrawal of the Israeli army and settlers from the Gaza Strip last year did not create the anticipated and much-needed momentum for the resumption of the political dialogue between the parties. The Israeli Government did not engage the Palestinian Authority as a political partner, opting instead for a unilateral approach. The consequences of this are evident today.

There was no progress in the political area, either immediately after the pullout or in the course of the months that followed. The agreement on movement and access from and to Gaza existed largely on paper. The border crossings have remained closed for long periods of time, especially since last June. In the West Bank, the number of checkpoints has increased during this year by one third, effectively dividing the territory into three separated cantons. The results are painfully familiar: a stifled economy, rising unemployment and widespread poverty and despair among the Palestinian people.

This additional aggravation of the situation of the Palestinian people is accompanied by the already notorious practices of the occupying Power: intensified expansion of settlements in the West Bank, including around East Jerusalem with the "E 1 plan" — a premeditated land confiscation of previously unseen proportions; the acceleration in the construction of the illegal wall in the occupied Palestinian territory; continued Israeli incursions into Palestinian population centres throughout the year; extrajudicial killings; house demolitions; daily arrests, including arbitrary detention of Palestinian Authority officials and Palestinian Legislative Council members. That has been compounded over the past few months by intensified air strikes and artillery and tank shelling of the Gaza Strip, with all of their deadly consequences for the innocent civilian population.

Speaking in the Security Council on 9 November 2006 and to the General Assembly, which met in an emergency special session on 17 November 2006, I expressed the Committee's strong condemnation of the Israeli incursions into Gaza, the grossly disproportionate use of force and the enormous and widespread devastation caused by the heavy weaponry. The Committee has also called on Palestinian groups to stop the firing of Qassam rockets and other weapons from the northern Gaza Strip into Israel, which has recently claimed the lives of two Israeli civilians and critically injured others. The Committee strongly condemns any act leading to the killing of innocent civilians by either side. It calls for an end to the spiral of violence, which will not contribute to reducing tensions or to creating conditions conducive to a resumption of peace negotiations.

The recently agreed ceasefire in Gaza, confirmed by the President of the Palestinian Authority, His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, and the Israeli Prime Minister, His Excellency Mr. Ehud Olmert, is a very welcome sign that both parties wish to step back from the violence and put an end to the warfare. The ceasefire must be adhered to scrupulously by both parties. A favourable situation has thus now been created, and that precious advance must be strengthened, without delay, by tangible political steps that would demonstrate the intention of all concerned — including those in the field — to give dialogue and negotiations a real chance.

At this critical time, on behalf of the Committee, I call upon the Government of Israel to refrain from all actions that may destabilize the situation further, in particular its disproportionate use of military force and the settlement activity on Palestinian lands, including the construction of the West Bank wall. Israel will need to take steps to significantly improve the humanitarian situation of the Palestinians, in particular by lifting the curfew, easing restrictions on the movement of persons and goods and resuming the return of Palestinian tax payments that have been unjustly retained. The past year has clearly demonstrated that neither the use of force, nor unilateral steps will bring the parties any closer to a solution of the conflict.

Events in the wider Middle East region have only reconfirmed the centrality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for peace and security in the region. The Committee continues to support the efforts by the Quartet to unblock the stalemate in the political process and to resume meaningful negotiations between the parties. It is encouraged by steps undertaken by major regional stakeholders, such as the League of Arab States and the Organization of the Islamic Conference and some of its member States, to advance the Arab Peace Initiative.

The Non-Aligned Movement and other organizations have called for an international conference on peace in the Middle East. It would be desirable for that idea to gain momentum and be developed further in accordance with the concrete suggestions put forward by Spain and France.

Our Committee firmly believes that the United Nations, for its part, must continue to maintain its permanent responsibility towards the question of Palestine, until it is genuinely resolved in all its aspects. Here, it is particularly crucial for the Security Council to live up to its central role under the Charter for maintaining international peace and security. The request for monthly briefings on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestine question, is an expression of the Council's preoccupation with the conflict. What is needed, though, is concerted action towards the realization of its decisions.

Ultimately, it is the implementation of the United Nations resolutions, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), that will lead to a permanent two-State solution — Palestine and Israel — based on the 1967 borders, and the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people as they have been defined by this Assembly.

In that context, I would like to introduce to the General Assembly the four draft resolutions approved by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and circulated under the agenda item, namely A/61/L.31, A/61/L.32, A/61/L.33 and A/61/L.34. Allow me first to inform you that the following countries have associated themselves with the sponsors of the four draft resolutions as follows: the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Sierra Leone with draft resolution A/61/L.31; Sierra Leone with draft resolution A/61/L.32; Sierra Leone and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) with draft resolution A/61/L.33 and finally Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) with draft resolution A/61/L.34.

The first three drafts deal with the work of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the tasks of the Division for Palestinian Rights, and the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information. The draft resolutions reaffirm the important mandates entrusted to those entities by the General Assembly. As in the past, the Committee intends to make sure that resources available to it are employed in a cost-effective manner for all mandated activities.

The fourth draft (A/61/L.34), entitled "Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine", reiterates the position of the General Assembly with regard to the essential elements of such a settlement and also includes references to the developments of the past year. In particular, this year's draft emphasizes the central role the Security Council should play in the efforts towards achieving a peaceful settlement of the question and encourages all actors of the international community, including the Quartet, to take immediate steps supporting the resumption of peace negotiations.

The four draft resolutions that I have just introduced outline positions, mandates and programmes that are of special importance, particularly at the present critical stage. I would therefore like to call on the General Assembly to vote in favour of the draft resolutions and to support the important goals contained therein.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Victor Camilleri of Malta,

Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, who will introduce the Committee's report.

Mr. Camilleri (Malta): In my capacity as Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I have the honour to present to the General Assembly the annual report of the Committee, contained in document A/61/35. Allow me to summarize each section of the report.

Chapter I contains the introduction, outlining the Committee's objectives and its general perspective on the events that have taken place in the course of the year.

Chapters II and III summarize the General Assembly mandates for the Committee, the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information, and contain information on the organization of the Committee's work during the year.

Chapter IV reviews the situation relating to the question of Palestine and the relevant political developments as monitored by the Committee during the year. This review includes the conduct of the Palestinian Legislative Council elections in January 2006 and the swearing-in of the new Palestinian Government in March 2006; the reaction by the international community to the electoral results and subsequent cessation of major direct donor assistance; the withholding of Palestinian tax revenue transfers by Israel; the efforts by the Palestinian leadership to resolve the internal difficulties; the escalation of violence in the occupied Palestinian territory, resulting in many casualties among Palestinians due to Israel's disproportionate use of force, but also among Israeli civilians following suicide bombings.

The chapter also deals with Israel's intensified military operations in the Gaza Strip and a further worsening of the humanitarian situation in Gaza and reviews other issues of concern to the Committee, including Israel's "convergence plan", the continued construction of the separation wall, the settlement expansion, the continued incarceration of Palestinians in Israeli detention facilities, the situation with respect to water resources available to the Palestinians, and the operational difficulties faced by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. In this chapter, the Committee strongly condemns the policy and practice of extrajudicial killings of Palestinians, as well as all attacks against Israeli civilians in Israel.

Chapter V reviews the action taken by the Committee. It is divided into two main sections. Section A describes action in the Security Council, as well as statements issued by the Bureau of the Committee. It also contains information on the participation by the Chairman at international forums. Section B contains a detailed account of the implementation of the programme of work of the Committee and the Division. It also provides information on the continued dialogue between the Committee and members of the European Union and other intergovernmental organizations.

Subsection 1 gives an account of the various international meetings and conferences organized in the course of the year. Subsections 2 to 7 deal with the Committee's cooperation with intergovernmental organizations and civil society; research, monitoring and publications work of the Division; the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL); the training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority; and the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Chapter VI provides an overview of the work done over the year by the Department of Public Information in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 60/38 of 1 December 2005.

The last chapter of the report, chapter VII, contains the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee. In this chapter, the Committee expresses particular concern at the Israeli incursions into Gaza during the recent months and its destructive effects on the Palestinian people and on their hopes for peace. It reminds Israel, the occupying Power, that it is bound by the Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, which obliges the parties to protect civilians during hostilities. It calls on Israel to end its incursions into Gaza, cease offensive military operations in the occupied Palestinian territory, withdraw its forces to their original positions outside Gaza, and release, immediately and unconditionally, all imprisoned cabinet members and parliamentarians, as well as other Palestinian prisoners.

The Committee strongly condemns the killing of innocent civilians by either side, denounces rocket attacks on Israel and calls for a cessation of these

activities by the Palestinian armed groups. The Committee strongly opposes the expansion of settlements in the West Bank and efforts to complete the construction of the wall on Palestinian land, as well as the Israeli Government's intention to expand large settlement blocks in the West Bank.

The Committee welcomes the signing of the National Conciliation Document by the major Palestinian political organizations, the decision to form a national unity government, and the designation of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas as the person in charge of negotiations with Israel. It calls on the international community to focus on practical and meaningful benchmarks to engage all parties to achieve a mutual ceasefire and support major international peace efforts, including the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map. The Committee reiterates that only a negotiated solution can bring about the goal of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine through the establishment of two States, Israel and Palestine, based on the 1967 borders.

The Committee emphasizes the essential contribution of the Division for Palestinian Rights in support of its mandate aimed at enabling the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights.

The Committee stresses that its programme of international meetings and conferences contributes to focusing the attention of Governments, intergovernmental and civil society organizations and the general public on issues critical for advancing a peaceful settlement of the conflict. In this regard, the Committee intends to focus international events to be organized under its auspices in 2007 on a member of specific issues.

The Committee commends civil society organizations for the efforts at upholding international legitimacy with regard to the question of Palestine through advocacy and the mobilization of public opinion and for their initiatives aimed at alleviating the plight of the Palestinian people. The Committee expresses its intention to work to involve parliamentarians in its programme of international meetings and conferences.

The Committee requests the Division for Palestinian Rights to continue its substantive and secretariat support; the programme of research, monitoring and publications and other informational activities, such as the further expansion and development of UNISPAL, including the graphic enhancement of the "Question of Palestine" web site; the annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority; and the annual observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

The Committee requests that the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information be continued, with the necessary flexibility, as warranted by developments relevant to the question of Palestine.

Finally, the Committee, wishing to make a contribution to the achievement of a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, and in view of the many difficulties facing the Palestinian people and besetting the peace process, calls upon all States to join it in this endeavour and invites the General Assembly again to recognize the importance of its role and to reconfirm its mandate with overwhelming support.

In closing, I would like to express the hope that the report I have just presented will be of assistance to the Assembly in its deliberations on the question of Palestine.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi, chairman of the observer delegation of Palestine.

Mr. Kadoumi (Palestine): Allow me at the outset to express our profound gratitude to you, Madam President, for your outstanding leadership and stewardship in presiding over the General Assembly at its sixty-first session. At the same time, I have the pleasure to thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and its Chairman, Ambassador Paul Badji, as well as the United Nations Division for Palestinian Rights, for all their efforts and hard work of preservation, which make the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People an event of worldwide importance that is commemorated today in almost every country throughout the world.

On this important occasion, it is necessary to remember that it was due to the support of peace-loving nations that the Palestine Liberation Organization was recognized by the General Assembly, through its resolution 3236 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974, which reaffirmed the inalienable rights of the

Palestinian people in Palestine, including the right to self-determination without external interference and the right to national independence and sovereignty.

Throughout the 1980s, the support of peace-loving friendly nations was monumental in influencing governmental decisions in the right direction with a view to achieving peace and justice in the Middle East, with the question of Palestine occupying a central role in efforts to achieve peace and security in the whole Arab, Islamic and Mediterranean region.

Following the first Palestinian intifada, the Palestine National Council was held in Algiers in November 1988. It adopted the Declaration of Independence, which was duly recognized by the General Assembly on 15 December 1988. General Assembly resolution 43/177 acknowledged the proclamation of the State of Palestine by the Palestinian National Council on 15 November 1988 and decided that, as of that date, the designation "Palestine" should be used in place of the designation "Palestine Liberation Organization" (PLO) in the United Nations system, in conformity with relevant United Nations resolutions and practice.

Throughout the 1990s, several peace initiatives were launched, starting with the Madrid Peace process, in 1991, which was followed by the Oslo Accords of 1993. That led to the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority in the occupied Palestinian territory and all the ensuing agreements, such as the Wye Plantation and Taba agreements.

It is also worth noting that the Palestine Liberation Organization has always been prompt in accepting most of the international peace initiatives that have been proposed, and therefore that the responsibility for the failure and lack of implementation of most of those peace initiatives does not lie with the PLO.

At the beginning of this new century, Arab kings and heads of State unanimously adopted the Arab Peace Initiative during the 2002 Arab Summit in Beirut. That was followed by the Road Map launched by the Quartet, namely, the United States, the Russian Federation, the European Union and the United Nations — a plan that is supposed to be implemented under their auspices and that to this day remains the main internationally recognized framework for achieving a peace settlement.

The Road Map was a creation of the United States in 2003, but was stillborn as a result of Sharon's 14 reservations, followed by the five guarantees given by President Bush to Sharon in 2004. This has impeded the realization of that initiative and has enabled Israel to proceed with its unilateral policy in which the Palestinian leadership was considered a non-partner.

The negative approach to peace of the United States and Israel led to the late President Arafat's being placed under house arrest for more than two years before he passed away under suspicious circumstances that suggested poisoning. No international body was designated to launch an investigation into his passing, despite the fact that several Israeli statements and declarations had characterized him as the main obstacle to peace and called for his removal and demise. This disregarded the fact that in 1993, Arafat and Rabin, his main partner in the peace process, had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Rabin was also assassinated by the Israelis. The guarantees offered by President Bush to Sharon on 14 April 2004 are one of the most recent examples of the ambiguous United States approach to peace.

By 2003, Israel, instead of starting to implement the steps required for a peaceful settlement in accordance with the Road Map, had intensified the building of the apartheid wall, which represents a grave violation of human rights, international law and international humanitarian law, specifically the Fourth Geneva Convention. On 21 October 2003, the General Assembly adopted resolution ES-10/13 following the Security Council's failure to adopt a binding resolution on that question. After the issuing of the Secretary-General's report (A/ES-10/248) concerning Israel's disregard of that resolution, the General Assembly, meeting in emergency special session — based on resolution 377 A (V) of 1950, entitled "Uniting for Peace" — convened on 8 December 2003. That meeting saw the adoption of resolution ES-10/14, requesting an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice on the matter.

The hearings of the Court concerning the wall started on 23 February 2004 and ended with the issuing of the Court's advisory opinion on 9 July 2004, which called for the immediate cessation of the building of the separation wall. The wall stands 8 metres high and is designed to stretch over 800 kilometres, cutting Palestinian villages and cities off from one another and preventing farmers from reaching their lands and an

entire population from gaining access to most of its water resources. If completed, it will have a serious and dangerous impact on the lives and livelihoods of approximately 1 million Palestinian civilians, while resulting in the annexation of 55 per cent of the occupied Palestinian territory.

The Advisory Opinion called on Israel's friends to consider it an outlaw State in case of non-compliance. Despite the Advisory Opinion's emanating from the highest international judicial body, Israel proceeded with its plan, and the wall, which was 185 kilometres long in 2004, has stretched to 388 kilometres two years later. This led a number of human rights organizations to send a letter to all the States Members of the United Nations requesting the Secretary-General to call for the resumption of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, which would call for the activation of the International Court of Justice's Advisory Opinion due to Israel's non-compliance with the will of the international community and its total disrespect and disregard for the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice of July 2004.

In August 2005, however, the Israeli army decided to act unilaterally by evacuating its settlements and redeploying its military forces in Gaza. While pretending that it was withdrawing, it in fact kept its control over air and sea and over all land entrances to Gaza, besieging an already war-torn economy and a pauperized population.

In November 2005, a report on the difficult situation imposed by the Israeli occupation on the city of Jerusalem was issued by European diplomats living in Jerusalem and Ramallah, deducing that "Israel's activities in Jerusalem are in violation of both its road map obligations and international law". While Israel continues to suffocate the holy city of Jerusalem, it is also implementing its plans to annex the Jordan Valley through the expulsion of the Palestinian population from the Valley.

All such actions have been taken in order to fit in with Olmert's plan, which he had named the "convergence" plan and which meant, in fact, convergence towards permanent borders in the near future. Olmert's convergence plan involved keeping a hold on settlement blocs while evacuating other West Bank settlements.

Throughout 2005, repression in the occupied Palestinian territory increased on all fronts. Arrests and targeted assassinations were daily practices, and over 10,000 Palestinian political prisoners were still in Israeli jails, with Israel refusing to free them or to reconsider their cases through negotiations.

It is therefore imperative to emphasize that conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory had not improved, but rather deteriorated throughout a decade of painful and thorny negotiations since the launching of a lengthy and inconclusive process, starting with the Madrid initiative in 1991 and followed by the Oslo Accords of 1993 and all other related agreements.

Contrary to all agreements and peace initiatives, the building and expansion of settlements increased throughout the period of Ariel Sharon's Government, leading to the destruction of Palestinian livelihood through the bulldozing of a million olive trees, the destruction of orchards and 17,000 Palestinian homes, the restriction of movement for an already impoverished population and its deprival of any possible means of livelihood, leading to an unprecedented high rate of unemployment, which reached 87 per cent in the occupied Palestinian territory.

That stifling of the population increased while Israel, the occupying Power, invented all kinds of excuses to stall the peace process and, at the same time, never fulfilled the different mandates and time limits, using a policy of perpetual postponement of negotiations in order to avoid launching final status negotiations and making the realization of the two-State solution an impossible aim.

Such postponement and short-circuiting of the peace process, has been, unfortunately, approved and even reinforced by the dual policy of the United States, which, while encouraging different peace initiatives and offering to act as a sponsor or peace broker, has kept on approving and encouraging Israeli postponements, reservations and non-compliance with all such initiatives.

The year 2005 witnessed the United States experimentation with new formulas of democratic elections and the imposition of American-style elections on an exhausted population suffering from almost 40 years of occupation, instead of using its clout to impose the long-sought settlement, which, according to all United Nations resolutions, requires

the withdrawal of the Israeli occupying forces. In particular, Security Council resolution 242 (1967) emphasizes clearly the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war and has called since 1967 for the withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the conflict, along with a series of other required measures to reach a peace settlement.

The results of the Palestinian legislative elections that were held in January 2006 upon United States persistence and insistence, disregarding the priority of ending the occupation, were apparently a severe blow to the United States dreams of finally dealing with a subservient new leadership that would follow a different policy than that followed by the late leader President Arafat.

Moreover, the results of the recent elections have in fact proved that the reading of the United States of the facts on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territory was completely erroneous and that the impoverished Palestinian population had been frustrated by long years of inconclusive and futile negotiations that had led to a worsening of their human, social and economic situation. The wall was expanding; the checkpoints were increasing; assassinations, with all their collateral damage, including the murder of innocent children, were on the rise; the more than 10,000 prisoners languishing in Israeli jails were not being released; over a million olive trees had been uprooted and 17,000 homes destroyed; while the late President Arafat, the leader who had agreed to all the required concessions imposed on the Palestinian leadership through the Oslo Accords, had been removed.

Nothing in the humanitarian situation of the Palestinian population between November 2004 and January 2006 had improved; in fact, things were getting worse. On 5 April 2006, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development published a study entitled "The Palestinian war-torn economy", calling for an international strategy to aid the Palestinian economy after 40 years of occupation and to engage on the path of sustainable development and State formation.

In April 2006, a United Nations document entitled "Assessment of the future humanitarian risks in the occupied Palestinian territory" was issued, warning of an extremely bleak humanitarian situation for the Palestinian people in the following months.

On 9 May 2006, the Quartet issued a declaration that pointed to the material aspects on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territory, such as the catastrophic and deteriorating humanitarian and social conditions. While taking into consideration all the positive elements, including those contained in the Quartet declarations, it did not specify that the main reason for the deterioration of these conditions was the perpetuation of Israel's miserable occupation.

Despite all the warnings issued in the first half of 2006 by responsible parties representing international legitimacy, concerning an impending worsening humanitarian crisis in the occupied Palestinian territory due to a policy of collective punishment imposed on an unarmed civilian population, Israel, the occupying Power, continued to impose a policy of deliberate starvation, punishing the Palestinian people for simply electing their chosen representatives, which happened, unfortunately, to be not to the liking of Israel and the United States. These two highly moralistic Powers are of course free to choose their own representatives, even when they happen to be neoconservatives, evangelical zealots or racists calling for ethnic purification, as the new Israeli Minister of Strategic Affairs, Avigdor Lieberman, and others have done.

Despite the worsening humanitarian situation, a horrendous terrorist massacre was perpetrated by the Israeli military forces against innocent unarmed besieged Palestinian civilians on a Gaza beach on 9 June 2006, when a poor Palestinian family picnicking on the beach was completely destroyed, leaving only one little orphan girl as a survivor. This massacre was perpetrated for no obvious logical reason, except perhaps to rekindle the fires of war in the impoverished Gaza Strip while providing an excuse to reoccupy the territory from which Sharon had withdrawn his military months before.

The situation in the occupied Palestinian territory had therefore acquired catastrophic dimensions on the political, economic and humanitarian levels when, on 25 June 2006, a desperate group of Palestinian militants single-handedly attempted to alleviate the blockade on the Palestinian population by attacking Sofa and Karam Salem, one of the checkpoints used to strangle the Palestinian population. This led to the deaths of two soldiers and the abduction of a third. The militants had hoped that by holding a prisoner of war they might gain leverage in a legal exchange of prisoners between the two sides. We are talking here

about only one Israeli soldier, while there are 10,000 Palestinian civilians in Israeli jails.

Instead of seeking to diffuse the crisis by accepting to relinquish some of the 10,000 prisoners, including women and children, held for years and even decades in their jails, in exchange for one Israeli prisoner — a military man — Israel again decided to proceed with additional war crimes, repeatedly raiding and pounding the civilian infrastructure in the already impoverished Gaza Strip, blowing up houses, bridges and electric power stations. According to article 54 of Additional Protocol I to the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, such action constitutes a war crime, since it states clearly that it is prohibited to use starvation of a civilian population as a method of warfare and to attack, occupy and destroy the vital means of livelihood necessary for the survival of civilians.

On 13 July 2006, a Security Council meeting was held to consider the adoption of a draft resolution that would free the abducted Israeli soldier through an exchange involving Palestinian prisoners of war and to call for a ceasefire and a cessation of Israeli hostilities and military incursions in the Gaza Strip. But the United States kindly vetoed the draft. That of course made matters worse and led to the increase of violence at an unprecedented rate in the Gaza Strip. Concurrently, Israel pursued a policy of systematic abductions of elected members of the Palestinian Legislative Council, which constituted another blatant violation of international legitimacy.

On 12 July 2006, Lebanese militants from the Lebanese resistance movement decided to abduct two Israeli soldiers from the Israeli army of occupation — which still occupies stretches of Lebanese land and which constantly harasses the civilian population in the south of Lebanon — hoping again to reach a fair deal in the exchange of the abducted soldiers for Lebanese prisoners of war.

Once again, Israel chose the course of war and destruction rather than entering into peaceful negotiations for an exchange of prisoners, and decided to indulge in a war of unprecedented destruction against the whole of the Lebanese civilian population.

Israel's failure to attain its aims in Lebanon after devastating it finally led the United States to accept Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) which called for a cessation of hostilities in Lebanon on 11 August 2006. In its paragraph 11, the resolution called upon and authorized the Government of Lebanon and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon to deploy their forces in the south of the country and called upon the Government of Israel, in parallel, to withdraw all its forces from southern Lebanon as that redeployment began.

Several interpretations of that resolution followed, a current one being that it was accepted by the United States in order to save face for the Israeli army rather than to protect the Lebanese civilian population. However, consensus remains among the international community concerning the need for a parallel resolution for the Palestinian territory, that is, a resolution calling for a ceasefire, the cessation of all hostilities and the withdrawal of the Israeli army to recognized international borders, or at least to agreed-upon borders.

However, what is happening as far as Palestine is concerned is the opposite. Israeli raids, incursions, targeted assassinations, arrests and abductions of elected officials are daily activities, with such violent measures reaching a climax during the Beit Hanoun massacre of 8 November 2006, when innocent women and children were murdered while sleeping in their homes, as a result of the incessant ravages of Israeli raids.

Once again, the United States vetoed, on 11 November 2006, another resolution calling for an end to the hostilities and also condemning the Israeli-perpetrated massacre in Beit Hanoun.

Nevertheless, the General Assembly — meeting on 17 November 2006 at its tenth emergency special session — adopted, by 156 votes in favour, a resolution condemning the massacre, thereby proving once again that all of the free and peace-loving nations of the world are on the side of justice and fairness and do not fall into the trap of bias, one-sidedness and double standards, as expressed by the United States veto in the Security Council.

Moreover, it is worth noting that the Human Rights Council has twice adopted resolutions calling for the dispatch of fact-finding missions to the occupied Palestinian territory, despite Israel's continued rejection of such missions. The last such resolution was adopted on 15 November 2006.

The inability of the United Nations to implement its own resolutions and its tendency to succumb to the

various diversionary tactics used by the United States and Israel has given rise to a sense of disillusionment among all Palestinians concerning the role of the United Nations as peacemaker and peacekeeper with respect to the question of Palestine — a role it has been playing since 1947.

We therefore find it necessary at this point to draw the attention of the members of the Quartet to certain logical flaws concerning the implied responsibility of the present democratically elected Palestinian National Authority Government — a Government elected under their own supervision — for the continuation of violence in the occupied Palestinian territory and for the failure of the peace process, overlooking the fact that the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are still occupied territories and that Israel, the occupying Power, continues to take all kinds of violent and repressive actions against an unarmed civilian population.

Despite the Palestine Liberation Organization's acquiescence to all the conditions included in the various peace initiatives, consecutive Israeli Governments have continued to carry out repressive policies of all kinds and collective punishment against the unarmed Palestinian population, starting with the breaking of bones and followed by a policy of assassinations, arrests, preventive detentions and the imposition of military curfews, sieges and inhuman checkpoints, and, finally, by the building of the apartheid wall, whose stranglehold has transformed Palestinian cities and towns into huge, collective prison cells and ghettoes.

Unfortunately, the Quartet, which has the responsibility of applying the Road Map plan of 2003, has obviously not made the efforts required to put it into actual application. Its deeds remain at the level of rhetorical statements and inconclusive meetings and press statements.

Despite the positive and encouraging stand of the Russian Federation, one of the Quartet's main partners, which has always expressed a firm and principled stand in support of justice and peace in the Middle East, and in spite of the advanced positions expressed by various European countries, such as Spain, Italy and France, which have recently put forth a new initiative for the holding of an international conference, the actual implementation of practical measures to end the occupation has until now been stalled. No real pressure has been exerted on Israel, the occupying Power, to implement its side of the agreements, despite the fact that European nations have the moral and material power to do so.

The use by Western countries of moral standards that are unfair and of a terminology that often equates the victim with the aggressor, and an occupied, repressed and unarmed population with the Israeli army of occupation, the fourth most powerful army in the world — not to mention the fact that Israel is a nuclear Power — has been frustrating to the Palestinian people. Indeed, the Palestinians suffer not only from the consequences of occupation and poverty but also from the injustice of a new world order that not only confuses the aggressor with the aggressed but also blames the weaker side and accuses it of terrorist acts, not daring to describe as acts of terror the murderous, devastating warfare launched by powerful armies against civilian populations and infrastructures, and ignoring the legal distinction between resistance against occupation and terrorism.

Once again, it is necessary to point out that the responsibility for the failure to proceed with the implementation of the Road Map, which was supposed to have reached its final stages in 2005 — President Bush postponed it to 2009 — does not lie with the Palestinian side, since the whole initiative was stillborn owing to Sharon's 14 reservations, as I mentioned earlier, and the assurances that were later granted to him by President Bush himself in April 2004 in order to guarantee his re-election.

Moreover, it is necessary to emphasize, at this critical juncture, the fact that the Palestine Liberation Organization has recognized all relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, as well as the main peace initiatives, especially the latest Road Map plan. It staunchly adheres to international legitimacy and legality while still firmly believing in the capacity of the Quartet — which represents the main great military as well as moral Powers of today's world — to implement it, through the acquiescence of the two main parties to the conflict, namely the Palestine Liberation Organization, as the main legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, and the State of Israel, which, in its capacity as the occupying Power and as the most powerful party to the conflict, retains primary control of the means of resolving the conflict.

On that basis, we think that it is unnecessary and perhaps even futile for the international community to concentrate so many efforts and exert so much energy in pressuring the Palestinian National Authority Government, which is a local Government and has only local and limited powers, by imposing all forms of collective punishment on the totality of the Palestinian people, instead of pooling all our energies to solve the crux of the problem by calling for the withdrawal of the Israeli occupying forces and relieving the Palestinian population from all the pain they are enduring.

We have come to the United Nations today, still holding the olive branch, as did our late President in 1974. Past events, however, as well as the current configuration of forces, have proved that more than good will is required to achieve peace. A firm stand and actions are needed, so that international legitimacy and United Nations resolutions can finally be adequately implemented. We firmly believe that the United Nations is capable of protecting the ever-suffering Palestinian population by insisting on the deployment of its forces in the Palestinian territory. The Organization does so in other parts of the world, such as in the Sudan, where it is currently insisting on deployment, against the will of the Sudanese Government. It does so in spite of the short time span of the conflict there, compared to the lengthy ordeal imposed on and the war crimes committed against the Palestinian people over the last 40 years.

We, therefore, call on the international community to support the Palestinian cause for peace, so that the year 2007, which will mark the fortieth year of occupation, will see progress along the road to the achievement of a just and comprehensive settlement in the Middle East, allowing the Palestinians to exercise their inalienable rights and to establish their fully independent and sovereign Palestinian State. This would finally allow them and their neighbours to live in peace and harmony and would be in the best interest of world peace, stability and security.

I wish all delegates peace in the forthcoming year.

Ms. Núñez Mordoche (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to address the General Assembly on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

On this past 11 November, we commemorated the second anniversary of Yasser Arafat's passing. The historical leader of the Palestinian people died without seeing his great dream and that of his people come true. That same day, in a remembrance ceremony at his tomb, the current President of the Palestinian National Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, said that peace and security could not be achieved under occupation and colonization.

Unfortunately, the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, is a goal that is still very hard to accomplish, owing to the Israeli occupation. Today we are commemorating the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people; this is a day in which the international community reaffirms its support of this heroic people's efforts to exercise its self-determination and achieve independence.

The situation in the Palestinian occupied territory has continued to deteriorate in the last few months. The Israeli incursions in the Gaza Strip have caused even more deaths and a considerable worsening of the humanitarian situation, the most recent example being the massacre at Beit Hanoun on 8 November 2006, which claimed the lives of 19 Palestinians, among them eight children and seven women, with another 55 injured.

In view of the gravity of such events and the standstill in the Security Council as a consequence of the exercise of veto by one of its permanent members, the General Assembly resumed its tenth emergency special session and considered the issue. The resolution adopted on that occasion by the vast majority of Member States calls upon Israel, the occupying Power, to immediately cease its military attacks against the Palestinian civilian population in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and to immediately withdraw its forces from within the Gaza Strip to the positions occupied prior to 28 June 2006; it also calls upon Israel, the occupying Power, to scrupulously abide by its obligations and responsibilities under the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, with respect to the Palestinian occupied territory, including East Jerusalem.

Likewise, the resolution requests the Secretary-General to establish a fact-finding mission to investigate the attack that took place in Beit Hanoun on

8 November 2006 and to report to the General Assembly within 30 days. We are awaiting the results of said investigation and stress the need and urgency for full compliance with the resolution adopted by the General Assembly, in all its aspects.

The Non-Aligned Movement expresses its grave concern about the constant deterioration of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, especially as a result of the excessive, indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force by Israel, the occupying Power.

The economic, social and humanitarian crisis that the Palestinian people endure and the isolation of the Gaza Strip are worsening, particularly after the implementation of Israel's unilateral separation plan. The Non-Aligned Movement condemns the continued imposition of illegal policies and collective punishment against the Palestinian people. Israel must stop the occupation and its illegitimate and illegal practices in the occupied Palestinian territory, including the illegal construction of the wall, which is aimed at seizing and annexing Palestinian land and property and modifying the demographic and geographic composition of the Palestinian territory.

The Movement reiterates its call to Israel to immediately stop the military operations, the acts of violence and provocation, as well as the bombings against the Palestinian population. The Movement requests the withdrawal of the Israeli occupation troops from the Gaza Strip, Israel's fulfilment of its responsibility to repair all damages caused to the infrastructure of the Gaza Strip, and the immediate release of all Palestinian officials detained by Israel since 28 June 2006.

We call upon all States and the international community as a whole to provide urgent economic and financial assistance to the Palestinian people to alleviate its current financial and humanitarian crisis.

The member countries of the Non-Aligned Movement, once again, call upon the Security Council to take up its responsibilities, implement its own resolutions and take the necessary steps so that Israel respects international law and ends the occupation and the illegitimate and illegal practices in the occupied Palestinian territory. It is unacceptable that the Security Council continues to fail in the fulfilment of its permanent responsibility regarding the Palestinian question, while the question remains unsolved in all its aspects, on the basis of international law. The unilateral measures taken by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, represent a serious threat to the prospects for peace and the achievement of a negotiated agreement based on a two-State solution.

The Non-Aligned Movement will continue to support the Palestinian people and their leadership with a view to putting an end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967, in accordance with the rules and principles of international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions. We reaffirm our unswerving commitment to a just and peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the right of the Palestinian people to exercise their self-determination and sovereignty in an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Mr. Grönberg (Finland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The acceding countries Bulgaria and Romania, the candidate countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, and the European Free Trade Association countries Iceland and Liechtenstein, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Moldova, align themselves with this statement.

The European Union welcomes the agreement between President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to establish a mutual ceasefire in Gaza. It is a promising first step on a path towards a sustainable peace. We call upon both parties to adhere strictly to their commitments and avoid hasty actions which could jeopardize progress towards a sustained period of calm. The European Union encourages both parties to endeavour to extend the ceasefire to the West Bank.

The European Union urges the Palestinians to work towards national unity and to form a Government with a platform reflecting the Quartet principles and allowing for early engagement. Such a Government of national unity would also be a partner for the international community to support in the re-launching of the peace process.

The European Union expresses serious concern about the deterioration of the humanitarian, economic and financial situation in the occupied Palestinian

territories. We emphasize the importance of the implementation by both parties of the Agreement on Movement and Access of November 2005. We call on Israel also to respect previous agreements and to fulfil its obligations under them. We insist on the particular importance of regular operations at Gaza crossings, notably Rafah, and call on Israel to do its utmost to ensure that the crossings are opened and remain open. We also repeat our call on Israel to immediately resume transfers of withheld Palestinian tax and customs revenues.

The European Union reiterates its intention to contribute actively to the work of the Quartet to get the Middle East peace process urgently back on track in order to make progress towards a comprehensive settlement on the basis of the Road Map, relevant Security Council resolutions and the commitments made at Sharm el-Sheikh in 2005. This should be done in close cooperation with Arab partners. The international community must provide its full support to the parties in this respect.

The European Union reaffirms that it will not recognize any change to the pre-1967 borders other than those agreed by both parties. We recall the urgent need to make progress towards a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The European Union remains committed to the two-State solution as laid out in the Road Map and agreed between the parties, which would result in a viable, contiguous, sovereign and independent Palestinian State, existing side by side in peace with Israel living within recognized and secure borders.

Mr. Al-Shamsi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the delegation of the United Arab Emirates, I would like to express thanks and appreciation to you, Madam, for your wise management of this important meeting, and to express our sincere appreciation for the tireless efforts of His Excellency Ambassador Paul Badji, the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and the other members of the Committee, to achieve justice for the Palestinian cause.

On this, the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I would like to reaffirm the full support and solidarity of the leadership, Government and people of the United Arab Emirates with the brotherly Palestinian people in their just struggle to achieve their legitimate aspirations for ending the occupation of their land and deciding their destiny, just like any other people in the world.

Anyone who has followed the various stages of the Palestinian question — especially since the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II) of 1947, which divided Palestine into two States, one Palestinian, the other Israeli, and with the adoption of other resolutions, including Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002), Palestinian-Israeli agreements, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative, all of which endorsed the idea of the establishment of those two States in the region — must be disappointed by the continued obstructionist policies pursued to date by successive Israeli Governments to prevent the establishment of an independent Palestinian State.

There is also deep regret as a result of Israel's continued escalation of aggression and occupation and its gross violations of the human rights of unarmed Palestinian civilians. This includes crimes of genocide, armed aggression, the systematic destruction of homes, property and the national infrastructure, and the arbitrary arrest of thousands of people and the imposition of complete blockades of cities and villages in an attempt to isolate people from the outside world and prevent them from gaining access to emergency food, medical and relief assistance.

The United Arab Emirates considers the illegal measures implemented by successive Israeli Governments against the Palestinian people to be a clear demonstration of Israel's expansionist designs aimed at consolidating its occupation of the Palestinian territories. How otherwise could the conscience of humanity explain those offensive measures? Indeed, those measures coincided with the Israeli Government's decision to obstruct peace negotiations with the Palestinians; to expand its frantic illegal campaign of settler colonialism in the Arab and Palestinian territories, especially in Al-Quds Al-Sharif, changing its demographic, legal and Arab character and tampering with its Holy Places; and, before final status negotiations can begin, to draw new borders on spurious grounds at the expense of the original inhabitants — all in flagrant violation of internationally binding resolutions.

We wish to express our concern over the international community's inability to date to

implement the United Nations resolutions aimed at addressing the illegal Israeli violations, which have resulted in increased misery and despair among the Palestinian and Arab people. Today, we reiterate once again the permanent responsibility of the United Nations, particularly the Security Council, in accordance with its Charter mandate, to address the Palestinian cause, which we consider to be the core of the conflict in the Middle East.

We also emphasize that a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement cannot be achieved if the world continues to be silent in the face of the ongoing Israeli violations of the Palestinians' inalienable rights. It can be achieved only by taking all necessary measures to pressure the Israeli Government to undertake a full and unconditional withdrawal from all the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif, and by solving the problem of the Palestinian refugees in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy, the Arab peace initiative, the Sharm el-Sheikh understandings and the road map principles. In that context, we also emphasize the primacy of the following issues.

First, necessary and urgent international protection must be provided for the Palestinian people, and a special mechanism to investigate the recent Israeli crimes established. A system must be developed to prevent impunity and ensure justice, including reparations for damages.

Secondly, we must call on Israel urgently to lift all closures, blockades and restrictions imposed on the movement of personal goods in all Palestinian territories, and promptly to release scores of Palestinian prisoners, including children, women and members of the Palestinian Government.

Thirdly, the international community must condemn all settlement activities and unilateral measures undertaken by Israel in all Palestinian territories, particularly East Jerusalem, and require Israel to abrogate those measures immediately, in compliance with its obligations under international law and United Nations resolutions, including the resolutions of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly and the 2004 Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice.

Fourthly, Israel must be urged to abolish all laws and jurisdictions imposed over Jerusalem — including the Basic Law declaring Jerusalem the capital of Israel — and to halt the transfer of diplomatic missions to Jerusalem, restrictions on the movement of the original inhabitants, the confiscation of their lands and possessions, and other measures aimed at profaning holy places, preventing people from exercising their religious practices, and isolating the city from other Arab land. All such measures must be declared null and void and recognized for their negative impact on the lives of Palestinians and on the possibility of establishing a viable independent Palestinian State in the region.

Fifthly, all Member States, especially major donors, must resume the provision of all political, economic, humanitarian and technical assistance to the Palestinian Authority in order to prepare the ground for a new national Government that can meet the urgent basic needs of the Palestinian people, alleviate the worsening humanitarian crisis, and rebuild Palestine's economy and the structures of its fundamental national institutions.

The United Arab Emirates strongly condemns Israel's continued occupation of the Lebanese Shab'a farms and the Syrian Golan Heights, and its policies in the Golan, which include the seizure of more than 96 per cent of lands, the destruction of all facets of life, the expansion of settlement activities, the planting of mines, the destruction of the environment, the laying of continuous siege to the Syrians, the imposition of exorbitant taxes, coercive detentions and arrests, the denial of medical and educational services, and the distortion of educational curricula relating to the geography and history of the Golan. In that context, we support the legitimate demands of the Syrian Arab Republic for the restoration of the Golan, an integral part of its national sovereignty, and we call upon the international community to take urgent action to force Israel to abolish all such illegal and coercive measures taken in the Syrian Golan.

Finally, we look with optimism to the truce declared recently by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and hope that it will include the West Bank. We also emphasize that the next phase requires an urgent response from the Security Council and the Quartet to the recent initiative of the League of Arab States, which calls for a more effective role in reinvigorating the Arab-Israeli peace tracks in order to break the spiral of violence, restore Arab and Palestinian lands and rights, and reach a just and peaceful settlement of

the Palestinian question in accordance with the vision of two States, Palestine and Israel, living side by side in peace and security within internationally recognized borders. That will help to establish security, stability and peaceful coexistence among all countries of the region. We also call upon the international community to continue its support to the United Nations agencies and committees involved in support for the Palestinian cause and the Palestinian people, including the Division for Palestinian Rights, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories.

We hope that all members will vote in favour of the draft resolutions before the General Assembly regarding the Palestinian question and the situation in the Middle East.

Mr. Almansoor (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of my country's delegation, I thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and its Chairman for their tireless efforts to ensure that the Palestinian people can enjoy the inalienable rights recognized by the General Assembly in its resolution 3236 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974.

I also thank the Chairman for his excellent introduction of the Committee's report, which describes the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and other related political issues.

The report before us in document A/61/35, even in its general outlines, clearly reveals the catastrophic situation in the occupied territories. The deteriorating overall situation in the territories has been widely reflected in the international media, as noted in paragraph 25 of the report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, contained in document A/61/500, concerning the deteriorating humanitarian and security situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. The report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/31/35) refers to this continuing deterioration of the situation due to Israel's ongoing military activities, which are intensifying day by day.

There is no doubt that the present military aggression is but the latest phase in a long series that began with the Israeli occupation of Arab territories in 1967. The occupation forces have created very grave consequences for all of us. What complicates matters even more is that such aggressive acts are coupled with massacres committed by the occupying forces without the slightest regard for international law, legal instruments and agreed norms. I would cite in particular the recent Beit Hanoun massacre, which followed an Israeli statement declaring Israel's intentions to cease all military operations — intentions which are now a dead letter. At the same time the Secretary-General, in his statement on 8 November 2006, declared that he was shocked to have learned of what had happened at Beit Hanoun and of the many victims resulting from that Israeli military operation.

Unfortunately, the Security Council remained silent and impassive in the face of this massacre and did not even deplore or condemn it. This prompts Israel to believe that it is above the law and makes it more intransigent. As such it continues its acts of aggression while conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory continue to deteriorate. Tensions have reached unprecedented levels because of repressive measures taken by Israeli military forces in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention, of 12 August 1949, which concerns the protection of civilians in time of war.

Israel, however, is in violation of human rights and international humanitarian law, as is emphasized in the report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories (A/61/470), particularly in paragraph 64. In reply, Israel continues to cast doubt on those reports, which, however, are based on verified facts. When it cannot refute such facts, it resorts to justifying its actions as necessary security measures.

The report prepared by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) (A/61/67, annex) states in paragraph 11 that during the year 2005 the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was able to report that the Israeli army destroyed 224 Palestinian structures in the West Bank. In paragraph 15 the report also mentions that in 2005 the Israeli authorities demolished at least 114 Palestinian houses in occupied Jerusalem in the framework of its plan to conduct 1,000 demolition operations.

That makes us ask why the Israeli authorities have not complied with the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) of 9 July 2004, which underscored the illegality of the construction of the separation wall in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem and its surroundings. The Court clearly stated that this was totally in contradiction of international law, which stresses the inadmissibility of the acquisition of the land of others by force or undertaking activities of a sovereign nature that are intended to change the geographical status of a country.

The ESCWA report emphasizes in paragraph 35 that, contrary to Assembly resolution ES-10/15 of 20 July 2004, Israel is continuing the construction of the wall according to the new route approved by the Israeli Government in February 2005. Unless it is stopped, the revised route will encircle an additional area of 40 kilometres and will include Ariel/Emmanuel and other independent settlements. Those two sectors comprise 15 per cent of the total 670-kilometre length of the wall and will then absorb about 10 per cent of the territory of the West Bank on the western side of the wall and will make it possible for 75 per cent of the settlers to live west of the wall.

While those Israeli settlements are illegal and are condemned by the international community and by the International Court of Justice — which stated that it was illegal to build the wall — the Israeli Government is continuing to expand those settlements. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People noted in paragraph 28 of its report (A/61/35) that Israel is continuing relentlessly to expand the settlements, thus flouting Security Council resolution 476 (1980), which was aimed at obstructing pending legislation to make Jerusalem the eternal capital of Israel. Council resolution 478 (1980) determined that Israeli legislative and administrative measures designed to change the character and status of Jerusalem, especially the "basic law" on Jerusalem, are null and void.

In many cases, as reports have shown, the expansion of settlements continues under the pretext of natural expansion. As a result, there are now 260,000 settlers in the West Bank, while in East Jerusalem the number totals approximately 200,000. The separation wall in the West Bank and East Jerusalem is being constructed in a manner that allows it to integrate the majority of the settlements on its west side. The three large blocks of settlements — Gush Etzion, Ma'ale Adumim and Ariel — will, in fact, be cutting up Palestinian territories into cantons and isolating them from each other, clearly undermining the unity and territorial integrity of Palestine.

The issue of Palestine is at the heart of the Israeli-Arab conflict. A solution must be found that is consonant with United Nations resolutions and in conformity with the Millennium Declaration and with international instruments that stress the right of colonized and occupied peoples to self-determination and to work to establish a just and lasting peace throughout the world in accordance with the principles of the Charter.

Peace is a strategic choice. A just, comprehensive and lasting peace requires the full implementation of United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). Such a peace also requires that all of the agreements and commitments undertaken be honoured, as well as the results of the 1991 Madrid Conference, the principle of land for peace and the implementation of the Arab Peace Initiative, the implementation of the Road Map and the creation of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Mr. Elbakly (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): The General Assembly meets today to consider the question of Palestine, a question for which the international community has failed to find a solution for more than half of a century. During this period, the suffering of the Palestinian people and the denial of their legitimate rights and territory has continued, owing to Israel's intransigence and its refusal to allow the Palestinians to create their own State and exercise their right to self-determination.

Today's meeting also takes place shortly after the convening of the resumed tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly to discuss Israeli violations in the occupied Palestinian territory. At that session a clear message was sent that no State was above the law. That session followed the failure by the Security Council to shoulder its responsibility by putting an end to Israeli violations, owing to the use of the right of veto by one permanent member of the Council. Further, that session followed Israel's failure to achieve its objectives in Palestine and Lebanon through military means, and also its failure to comprehend the letter and spirit of the Arab message of

peace articulated during the special ministerial session of the Security Council on 21 September 2006. Therefore, today's meeting is of particular importance in reaffirming the support of the General Assembly — the most democratic organ of the United Nations — for the rights of the Palestinian people and their legitimate demands for a peaceful and just settlement, by ending the occupation and providing international protection for Palestinian civilians.

On that basis, we wish to underline the importance of enhancing the role and mandate of the General Assembly in addressing the Palestinian question. Efforts towards peace, liberty and equality should prevail, through the implementation of all resolutions dealing with Palestine, in order to ensure Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian territory and the other Arab territories occupied since 1967, and the full restoration of the rights of the Palestinian people, at the forefront of which are their rights to life, security and self-determination and the establishment of an independent and sovereign State with Jerusalem as its capital.

Similarly, enhancing the ability of the General Assembly to strengthen international respect for human rights in a framework devoid of selectivity, politicization and double standards necessitates the implementation of practical measures to ensure respect for the human rights of the Palestinian people and to break the wall of silence towards the continued violations of Palestinian rights, including the siege and closure of crossing points and roads, hindering the supply of food and humanitarian assistance, the expansion of settlements, territorial confiscation and construction of the separation wall despite the legal Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on the matter.

In that context, Egypt highlights the importance of implementing a number of confidence-building measures and actions with the support of the international community in order to realize a new political horizon through the relaunching of final status negotiations with a view to achieving a just, comprehensive and final solution to the question of Palestine, in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002, an updated Road Map with new specific timelines, and the implementation of United Nations resolutions and other relevant peace process terms of reference. In that regard, we call upon Israel to abandon its policy of unilateral withdrawal from negotiations, under the pretext of the lack of a peace partner. We also call upon the Quartet to reactivate its role and to formulate a clear vision for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State.

In addition to the efforts by the international community and regional parties, the Israelis and Palestinians have the responsibility of supporting steps aimed at restoring confidence and returning to the negotiating table. In that regard, we welcome the agreement between the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government to cease hostilities, as a necessary first step towards confidence-building, and in which Egypt is actively involved — through the release of the abducted Israeli solider in return for Palestinian prisoners, and the release of Palestinian officials and parliamentarians.

We also look forward to further steps that will break the cycle of violence and counter-violence and that will lead to the cessation of the repeated Israeli assaults on the Palestinian people and the redeployment of Israeli forces to their positions before 28 June 2006 in the Gaza Strip. We also look forward to the opening of border crossing points, especially the Rafah crossing point, and to improving the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territory, in addition to the halting of the construction of the separation wall and the implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access to facilitate the freedom of movement of Palestinians, and to allow for the continued provision of humanitarian assistance to them.

Egypt will spare no effort in supporting endeavours to move the peace process forward and will participate effectively in all efforts to achieve the unity of the Palestinian people and to form a Government of national unity that serves the aspirations of the Palestinian people to realize peace and development. All should be done that can lead to the relaunching of the peace process.

Egypt also supports international and regional efforts aimed at ending the stagnation of the peace process, and calls upon the leading international Powers to take serious steps in that direction. We appreciate initiatives by some countries to present new ideas and visions that would lead to resumption of negotiations, such as the latest Spanish, French and Italian initiative, which we are following with great interest, in addition to calls to convene an international

peace conference to relaunch the peace process and renew the commitment to the principle of land for peace and to all relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

We are deeply concerned about the continued lack of a solution to the Palestinian question throughout these many years. The international community's commitment to achieve international peace and security must promote, in an effective manner, the realization of the two-State solution, and ensure the sincere and just implementation of United Nations resolutions, the Road Map and other terms of reference without selectivity or bias, leading to a just and comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian question, which will produce stability in the Middle East and reaffirm the success of the United Nations in achieving the principles and values upon which it was established.

Mr. Hachani (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): The discussion in the General Assembly of the question of Palestine during its annual meeting, and in accordance with a tradition that goes back more than 50 years, is particularly important this year, given the current dangers in the occupied Palestinian territory and in the Middle East in general.

From this rostrum, and like a great number of peaceful States working for peace, Tunisia has tirelessly warned of the dangerous threat in the region after the setbacks to the peace process, owing to a lack of commitment to agreements concluded with the Palestinian side and to the halt in negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese fronts. That is a clear disavowal of the terms of reference of the peace process and its fundamental principles.

During the past few months, the occupied Palestinian territory has been the theatre of a dangerous Israeli military escalation in which the occupying forces have resorted to excessive violence. The most recent example of that violence is the atrocious massacre carried out in Beit Hanoun in the Gaza Strip, which claimed the lives of many innocent people, women and children. Such repeated acts of aggression are carried out in flagrant violation of the principles of international humanitarian law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 on the protection of civilians in time of war.

We cannot fail to welcome the truce agreed to recently by the Palestinian and Israeli sides. It is our hope that it will be respected by the parties and will be followed by other positive measures — specifically, a complete withdrawal by Israeli forces from the occupied Palestinian territories, a lifting of the embargo imposed on the Palestinians, the freeing of prisoners and a commitment to genuine negotiations leading to a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of this long-lasting conflict. A just and comprehensive peace in the region requires full and unconditional withdrawal by Israel from the occupied Syrian Golan and the other occupied Lebanese territories in accordance with the relevant resolutions and terms of reference.

Tunisia, which has been following with great concern the deteriorating situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, is totally convinced of the justice of the Palestinian cause. Therefore, we shall continue to lend our full support to the Palestinian people to ensure that they recover their legitimate rights, including the right to establish their own independent State on their national soil, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Given the dangerous situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, Tunisia calls on the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities and to play an effective role in protecting the defenceless Palestinian people. In that regard, we reiterate that international observers should be sent to protect the Palestinian people, as reaffirmed by His Excellency President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali at the Arab Summit held in Cairo in 1998. Tunisia also calls on the influential parties involved, in particular the Quartet, to shoulder their responsibilities and to ask Israel to respond to the peace process on the basis of the relevant international resolutions. That must be carried out in harmony with tireless Arab efforts to enable the Palestinians to fulfil their legitimate aspirations to freedom, dignity, peace and security in the region.

The United Nations, in particular the General Assembly, bears responsibility towards the Palestinian people, and that responsibility must be shouldered, because this forum is the guarantor and protector of the foundations of international legitimacy. That political role must be pursued with a view to reaching a just and final settlement of the Israeli-Arab conflict. While the General Assembly is considering those mandates, my delegation would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm the need to maintain and support the mandates related to the Palestinian question and the situation in

the Middle East, given the sensitive nature of that question, in order to arrive at a just and comprehensive settlement.

Finally, I wish to express our appreciation for the continued efforts of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, led by its Chairman, His Excellency Ambassador Paul Badji, to strengthen the role of the United Nations and settle this issue once and for all.

Mr. Al-Murad (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): Today, the General Assembly is considering one of the most important items on its agenda because of its close relationship to international peace and security. The Middle East region, despite its vitality and importance, has not been stable for decades, as a result of successive wars and conflicts and the depletion of its energies and resources.

A major challenge facing the region and threatening its peace and stability is the Israeli Government's persistence in its illegal policies and practices of aggression. The Israeli Government has adopted an approach based on the use of force to impose security, while it continues its occupation of territories. That formula, which has proved a failure, can only lead to further deterioration of the security situation by fuelling feelings of hatred and the continuing cycle of violence and instability.

These Israeli practices have now reached an intolerable level. Israeli military incursions into the West Bank and the Gaza Strip have become a routine daily occurrence. The killing of innocent civilians, including women and children, has become ordinary news that no longer shocks the international community or prompts it to take immediate action to put an end to these practices, which violate international laws and norms. During the past few weeks, the Israeli forces committed massacres in Beit Hanoun and other areas of the occupied Arab territories. Kuwait has strongly condemned that military offensive, which caused severe losses in terms of lives and property.

Given these Israeli practices, we wonder whether the civilized nations that defend human rights can accept acts such as extrajudicial assassinations; the excessive and indiscriminate use of military force; the destruction of Palestinian homes and institutions; the closure of crossings; the continued policy of siege and collective punishment; the collective arbitrary arrests and humiliating treatment of those held in Israeli prisons; and the continued construction of the separation wall, despite the legal opinion issued by the International Court of Justice on 9 July 2004, which states that the wall is illegal and contradicts the resolutions of international legitimacy. The opinion also calls upon Israel to remove the wall and compensate the Palestinians harmed by its construction.

All those practices represent clear and flagrant violations of the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 on to the protection of civilians in time of war. We believe that the States signatory to that Convention must undertake concrete measures to enforce its provisions and compel Israel to respect those provisions. In that regard, we welcome the most recent resolution adopted by the General Assembly at its resumed tenth emergency special session (resolution ES-10/16), particularly given the overwhelming support of the international community, for that resolution, after the Security Council had failed to shoulder its responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security owing to the repeated use of the right of veto by one permanent Council member.

Kuwait reaffirms its commitment to support the struggle of the Palestinian people to recover its full political rights so as to establish its own independent State on its own territory, with Jerusalem as its capital. We reiterate that, without the restoration of the full legitimate rights of the Palestinian people — in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions, particularly resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative — there can be no comprehensive, just and lasting peace or resolution of the Palestinian question, which is at the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Therefore, we call upon the international community as well as the Quartet to apply pressure on the Israeli Government to convince it that there will not be a military solution to the crisis, and that the only solution resides in a return to the negotiating table and the relaunching of the peace process leading to a full withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories and the implementation of resolutions of international legitimacy and the provisions of the Road Map.

Last summer, Lebanon was exposed to flagrant Israeli aggression that caused hundreds of innocent

civilian deaths and thousands of injuries. The destruction of numerous homes, bridges and civil institutions and the deliberate targeting of the country's infrastructure was an organized act of State terrorism and in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law. Kuwait has strongly condemned those shameful and inhumane crimes and expedited emergency humanitarian relief to alleviate the suffering of the Lebanese people. It has also made financial contributions to the reconstruction of what was destroyed by the Israeli aggression.

While Kuwait welcomes other measures adopted by the international community in implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), it calls upon Israel to put an end to its repeated aggression against Lebanon and its sovereignty and to respect Lebanon's independence and territorial integrity. Kuwait also calls upon the international community to assist and support the Lebanese Government in extending its authority over the entire territory of Lebanon and to support Lebanon's quest for the full restoration of its rights, including the right to adequate compensation for the harm inflicted upon it by the Israeli aggression.

Kuwait reaffirms the illegality of Israeli activities in the occupied Golan and reiterates its demand that Israel withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan to the lines of 4 June 1967, in implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions. Kuwait also reaffirms its position that the continued occupation and annexation of the Golan represents an intractable obstacle to the realization of a just and comprehensive peace in the region.

In the current Middle East environment, we can only hold onto the latest glimmer of hope, namely, the truce declared between the Palestinian President, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, and the Israeli Prime Minister in the Gaza Strip. While we welcome that ceasefire, we would also like to encourage both parties to extend it to include the West Bank. We also urge both sides to take responsible measures to preserve the truce, avoid acts of aggression and resist any temptation to be swayed by extremists who seek to destroy all attempts to restore confidence between Palestinians and Israelis.

We also hope that that ceasefire will constitute a first step and a prelude to the resumption of the negotiating process, with a view to achieving a comprehensive peace settlement that will lead the entire region to the security and stability to which it aspires. We further hope that the Israeli Government will finally realize that the basic demand for security is not only an Israeli right but it is also a right for all other countries of the region. Israel does not have a monopoly on that right.

Such a vision of the Arab-Israeli conflict is part and parcel of the foreign policy of Kuwait, which favours a Middle East based on stability, mutual respect and cooperation among all parties. Such stability will certainly require confidence-building measures, foremost of which would be an agreement declaring the Middle East region a zone free from all weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons.

Mr. Swar-Aldahab (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): Madam President, allow me to congratulate you once again for your wise conduct of the discussions of the General Assembly since the beginning of this session.

My delegation has viewed with interest the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People contained in document A/61/35, the report of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) contained in document A/61/13, and the report of the Secretary-General on the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine contained in document A/61/355. We have also taken note of the report by the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Ibrahim Gambari, on the situation in the Middle East, submitted to the Security Council on 21 November 2006.

My country follows with great concern the developments in the Palestinian territories as reflected in the media and in the reports that I just mentioned. The successive developments reflecting the magnitude of Palestinian suffering, the most recent of which was the massacre at Beit Hanoun on 8 November 2006, reflects the urgent need for international intervention to put an end to such suffering. Regrettably, we would like to draw attention to the Security Council's inability to take responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security with respect to this incident, owing in large part to the use of the right of veto by a certain permanent member despite the fact that the draft resolution was balanced. On the other hand, we commend the General Assembly's adoption by an overwhelming majority of a resolution to

dispatch an international fact-finding mission to look into the incident within one month.

The unprecedented Legislative Council elections involving 77 per cent of the electorate and took place under the supervision of 20,000 national observers and 1,000 international observers, including observers from the European Union, the Carter Center/National Democratic Center Institute and the Canadian Government. Since then, and since the Palestinian Government's assumption of its functions, the Palestinian people have been subjected to several measures by the Israeli occupation aimed at undermining the Palestinian Authority. Those measures include efforts to consolidate its control over East Jerusalem and other strategic areas in the West Bank, military incursions into the Gaza Strip, air raids and artillery bombardments and the indiscriminate arrest of Palestinian Authority officials, including members of the Legislative Council. Other arbitrary measures include closures, demolition of houses and destruction of the infrastructure and the hasty construction of the illegal separation wall, in violation of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice.

In this connection, we would like to note the recommendation that the Secretary-General established a register of all the damages suffered by all of the individuals and entities affected by the construction of the wall so that they can be compensated.

Other measures taken by the Israeli occupiers in response to the Palestinian elections include the withholding of customs and value-added tax revenues from the Palestinian Authority, resulting in a severe financial crisis in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. A number of reports, including by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), state that there has been a severe deterioration in terms of the economy, availability of foodstuffs, agricultural exports and security, prompting the League of Arab States and some Governments to provide emergency financial aid to the Palestinian Authority to help it to overcome the profound crisis. In this regard, we would like to call upon all donors and the international community to review their policies on assistance to the Palestinian Authority and to bring pressure to bear on Israel to release all revenue and customs transfers to the Palestinian Authority in order to halt the deterioration of the humanitarian situation suffered by the Palestinian people.

The number of prisoners and detainees — including women, children and high-level Palestinian officials — in Israeli prisons has now reached 10,100. They are exposed to serious health risks and suffer humiliation and torture. As the Secretary-General has said, the detention of Palestinian officials who were freely and democratically elected is a particular cause for concern.

The Israeli Prime Minister's declaration that he intends to take unilateral steps to delineate the borders of Israel prompted the Quartet to state that such unilateral measures must not affect final status negotiations. We appeal to the international community to put pressure on Israel to end such measures, which violate international laws and norms, before any final status discussions can take place.

Given the deterioration of the situation in the Palestinian territories, my delegation would like to commend UNRWA and its programme of assistance to the Palestinian people, the World Food Programme and other United Nations agencies working in the Palestinian territories to alleviate the daily suffering of the Palestinian people. We call on the United Nations Department of Public Information to make greater efforts to undertake programmes to provide the international community with basic information on the issue.

We have also taken note of the measures adopted by the Security Council and statements issued by international conferences on Palestine and by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. We would like to appeal to all members of the international community to continue to show concern over the question of Palestine, as it is at the heart of the situation in the Middle East.

On this, the day when we express our solidarity with the Palestinian people and its struggle to establish an independent State, with Jerusalem as its capital — a commemorative event organized by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People — we reaffirm our solidarity with and support for our brothers in Palestine, and make clear once again that the question of Palestine is the crux of the conflict in the Middle East and that the Security Council should shoulder its responsibility to preserve international peace and security and take immediate and decisive measures to compel Israel to withdraw, immediately and unconditionally, from all occupied

Palestinian territories in implementation of all international resolutions, and to take advantage of the declared ceasefire between Israel and the Palestinians to reach a just and comprehensive solution to the conflict.

Mr. Algahrah (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like, first of all, to thank Ambassador Paul Badji, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, for all of the efforts that he and the other members of the Committee have made. We would like to take the opportunity today — the Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People — to reaffirm the solidarity of the Kingdom and the people of Saudi Arabia with the Palestinian people.

We have no doubt about the capacity of Israel to invent excuses and justifications for launching repeated hostilities and to cause confusion and chaos in the region, especially in Palestine, by exacerbating tensions. Indeed, the facts show that Israel is not truly trying to bring about a lasting and comprehensive peace based on legitimate international resolutions. Quite the contrary, Israel is continuing its flagrant violations of international law, as well as its unjustifiable use of disproportionate force and resort to its military machine, in violation of agreed international instruments and understandings.

Israel does not respect international resolutions or international humanitarian law or the Fourth Geneva Convention. Its arbitrary practices, including embargoes, arrests and the destruction of infrastructure, are destroying the lives of Palestinian people on a daily basis. Such actions are contrary to logic and reason. Israel is attempting to abort and destroy all initiatives for peace, including the most recent — the Arab Peace Initiative adopted at the 2002 Beirut Summit.

The Israeli Government is able to continue its hostile acts because of the passivity of the international community and the failure of the Security Council to live up to its obligations to maintain international peace and security and to ensure the implementation of its resolutions. Israel has continued its hostilities, in spite of international concern, by claiming that it is acting in self-defence, and considers that its acts of terrorism are legitimate and acceptable. Examples of Israel's hostile acts and its failure to respect international law include its actions to destroy the cultural identity of the Palestinian people and to change the facts on the ground by constructing the racist separation wall, which prevents Palestinians from gaining access to their fields, their places of work and their universities and schools, as well as to health and social services. Today, 220,000 Palestinians have no access to clean potable water.

Israel insists that its unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip was to give the Palestinians their rights and freedom; this is a false claim and the withdrawal was simply a ruse. The hopes of the Palestinians were destroyed within the first few months after the so-called withdrawal by Israel, because the facts on the ground showed that Israel still controlled the land, sea and airspace. Thus, Israel exercises firm control over the Gaza Strip, and all means of access to it are covered by the occupation army. This means that the area's inhabitants are prisoners who are forced to accept occupation with all its injustices and indignities.

Tension and violence persist in the occupied territories, because the Road Map has not been carried out, the Arab Peace Initiative has not been accepted and international resolutions have not been implemented.

However, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has hope that reason will prevail. In order to correct this situation in the region, the Security Council must exercise its mandate, as enshrined in the Charter — namely, the maintenance of international peace and security. It is illogical that this situation should continue — and it has already continued for six decades — for it will affect the credibility of the United Nations in the world's eyes.

Peoples of the world witness daily flagrant Israeli violations that run counter to all international laws and norms and that do not conform to international humanitarian law.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia reiterates its invitation to Israel to implement international resolutions on the Arab-Israeli conflict in order to establish peace and security in the region in place of destruction and to direct its attention to development and peaceful coexistence. That can be achieved by recognizing the rights of the Palestinian people, including a return to the 1967 borders and a guarantee for the right of return of refugees, the creation of a Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and return of the occupied Golan and other occupied

land in Lebanon. The international community must play its role and deal with the root causes of these regional conflicts. The cause of these conflicts is the absence of a comprehensive, just peace. Pressure must be brought to bear on Israel to comply with and implement the relevant United Nations resolutions.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and its leader, King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, reiterate its call for an international conference on the Palestinian question to be attended by all parties, to discuss peace initiatives and translate them into concrete steps in order to protect the Palestinian people from the killing and terrorism exercised by Israel without any deterrence.

With regard to Lebanon, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia requests all political powers in Lebanon to safeguard the unity and sovereignty of their country and to give precedence to the language of dialogue among themselves. The Lebanese should not give an opportunity to terrorists to act in a way that can only undermine the stability and peace of the country. In this context, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia reiterates its support to Lebanon and its people.

With regard to the situation in Iraq, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia regrets all acts of violence committed in the name of sectarianism and religious extremism, and condemns all acts of violence irrespective of their source. We call upon the permanent members of the Security Council and Iraq's neighbour countries to exercise their responsibility to support Iraq, its territorial unity and national independence and not to undermine the internal cohesion and social balance, the brotherliness and solidarity that unite the different tribes, faiths and regional groups in Iraq.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia reaffirms the importance of non-interference in the internal affairs of Iraq and non-infringement on its sovereignty and identity. Iraq needs international support in order to exercise its sovereignty, independence and identity, and to promote unity at the national and regional levels. Present and future initiatives on Iraq must come from within Iraq and must express the free and independent will of the Iraqi people in all its sectors and groups. It is clear that religious authorities of all faiths in Iraq have a great responsibility, and they need to use their influence to promote solidarity, unity and brotherliness among all citizens of the Iraqi nation.

Mr. Hamidon (Malaysia): Let me begin by associating myself with the statement delivered by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Permanent Representative of Senegal, in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. My delegation expresses our appreciation to him for presenting the report of the Committee, as contained in document A/61/35. My delegation fully endorses the observations, conclusions and recommendations contained in the report. My delegation also expresses appreciation to the Secretary-General for presenting his report, as contained in document A/61/355.

The question of Palestine and the struggle of the Palestinian people in exercising their inalienable rights have been on the agenda of the Assembly for almost four decades. Their desire for an independent and sovereign State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, has not been met and continues to be blocked by Israel, the occupying Power. The Palestinian people have experienced unimaginable suffering for far too long.

My delegation fully sympathizes with the plight and the dire circumstances of the Palestinian people. Extrajudicial killings, killings of innocent civilians, unlawful detention, excessive and indiscriminate use of force and illegal confiscation of Palestinian land by Israel and its State terrorism apparatus continue unabated. Extensive damage and destruction continue to be inflicted upon Palestinian infrastructure, homes and properties. The construction of the separation wall, which has been declared contrary to international law by the International Court of Justice, has not ceased; instead, it has proceeded, turning the occupied Palestinian territory into a vast open-air prison.

Malaysia strongly condemns all inhumane and brutal actions by Israel that violate international law and international humanitarian and human rights law, as well as numerous Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. Malaysia demands once again that those actions be ended immediately.

My delegation continues to recognize the important role of the members of the diplomatic Quartet. We recognize the challenges that they are facing in ensuring the full and unconditional implementation of the Road Map. The Road Map that they had painstakingly drafted has provided real hope

for peace. Unfortunately, three years have gone by since its adoption, and that hope for peace remains but a distant dream.

Death, destruction and despair continue on both sides. Given the current situation on the ground and the steadily deteriorating overall situation in the region, it appears that the Road Map has been deliberately asphyxiated by Israel, clearly a power mightier than the members of the Quartet combined. Unfortunately, serious efforts to put the Road Map back on track have apparently been an exercise in futility. It would seem that putting Israel in the driver's seat has done nothing but to ensure that the Road Map has led to nowhere.

My delegation shares the frustration of the international community, particularly of Palestine and its Arab neighbours, at the lack of progress in finding a solution to the conflict. We therefore call upon the international community to collectively generate a new approach towards the protracted Palestinian-Israeli conflict, bearing in mind the need to resolve it in the larger framework of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

In that connection, my delegation supports the call by the League of Arab States for a new Middle East peace conference. This effort must place the United Nations at its core. Unlike its role in the Quartet, we believe that the United Nations should not merely play a subservient role in that envisaged process, bearing in mind its permanent responsibility in efforts to find a comprehensive solution to the question of Palestine in all its aspects.

While serious efforts to resuscitate the Middle East peace process are under way, my delegation reiterates once again that we must immediately establish an international mechanism to protect the civilian population in the occupied Palestinian territory, as called for in operative paragraph 9 of General Assembly resolution ES-10/16. We believe that under the present circumstances of heightened tension, only the forcible separation of the two sides to the conflict would provide the necessary peace and security that would enable the resumption of negotiations aimed at a political settlement.

As Chair of the Tenth Islamic Summit Conference and member of the Non-Aligned Movement Troika, Malaysia will continue to work closely with the international community and the United Nations to seek a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the question of Palestine, based on the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Road Map and the principle of Land for Peace.

In this connection, Malaysia, in close cooperation with the United Nations, will host the United Nations Asian Meeting in Support of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the United Nations Forum of Civil Society in Support of the Palestinian People. These two important events will take place in Kuala Lumpur from 15 to 17 December 2006. Malaysia hopes that the outcome of these events will contribute to ongoing efforts by the international community to seek a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the question of Palestine.

The General Assembly remains the last bastion of hope for the Palestinian people. Let us remind ourselves that the United Nations shoulders a permanent responsibility in resolving the question of Palestine in all its aspects. Let us not disappoint the Palestinians, whose faith in the United Nations is steadily diminishing as a result of the Organization's inability to stop the incessant Israeli acts of aggression and suppression. We must respond to the call by Palestine to the international community to shoulder its responsibility to protect the lives of its defenceless population from genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated by Israel and, equally importantly, to end Israeli occupation.

Let us continue collectively our efforts to realize the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. My delegation expresses hope that serious efforts currently under way, in particular by the Israeli and Palestinian leadership, to revive the Middle East peace process will produce the outcome long desired by the international community.

Programme of work

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I would now like to inform the members of some amendments that have been added to the agenda of the General Assembly on 4 December 2006. In addition to the first item considered in the morning session, agenda item 10 on the role of diamonds in fuelling conflict, the Assembly will take up as the second item the reports of the Sixth Committee, which were originally scheduled for the afternoon of Monday, 4 December. As a third item, the Assembly will resume its consideration of agenda item 43 on the return or restitution of cultural

property to the countries of origin, so as to take action on draft resolution A/61/L.15. As the fourth item, the Assembly will resume its consideration of agenda item 44 on a culture of peace, so as to take action on draft resolution A/61/L.16. Finally, as the fifth item, the Assembly will resume its consideration of sub-items (c), (e), (r), (s) and (t), of agenda item 108 on cooperation between the United Nations and regional and other organizations, in order to take action on draft resolutions A/61/L.13, A/61/L.18, A/61/L.20, Rev.1, A/61/L.29 and A/61/L.37.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.